

The Pheasant-Coucal.—The range of the Pheasant-Coucal (*Centropus phasianinus*) extends from N.W. Australia to New South Wales. The writer has observed it from the north of the Richmond River to La Perouse, near Sydney. It is more numerous in the Clarence and Richmond River districts than anywhere else, although along the Karuah River it is fairly common, while at La Perouse, in swamps near the Coast Hospital, odd birds have often been met with. The alluvial flats of the coastal rivers, where bracken fern is intermingled with sword-grass and rushes, or shallow fresh-water swamps and creeks overgrown with sedge, reeds and rushes, constitute the habitats and favourite haunts of this handsome and quaint species. In sugar-cane fields adjacent to creeks, low lying damp ground, or swamps, it is extremely plentiful, and has often been disturbed while searching for food among the cane.

The Pheasant-Coucal is mainly insectivorous, all manner of insects being devoured, large or small, while many other small animals frequenting damp and swampy places add to its bill of fare. Systematic investigation might prove that it is of real and inestimable value to sugar-cane growers, and may be found to be of great assistance in minimising the depredations of the two sugar-cane beetle pests (*Xylotrupes australicus* and *Lepidoderma albo-hirtum*), which cause extensive damage at times. It is impossible to give any idea of the raucous and harsh notes of this bird—a raucity and harshness all its own. Its progression on foot is none the less characteristic; sometimes it hops, while now and then it has recourse to a sort of canter, when in the open; but in the rushes and such like it creeps and runs with celerity. One has to see it to appreciate fully its wonderful adaptability in getting through thick growth.

During the breeding season, which usually commences in October and extends over several months in favourable weather, the female is very cautious, and is seldom seen; but the male may often be seen perched in a low tree overlooking its haunt. When an intruder encroaches on its domain, and flushes it unexpectedly, it rises by a most laborious flight, simultaneously gives forth its harsh notes, and seeks refuge in any low tree protruding just above the rushes, where it can view its enemy without showing its form completely. Perching on a lower branch close to the trunk, it scans the surroundings, then cautiously it hops from one branch to the next one higher till the limit of its ascent is reached, when it descends to a lower branch, returning to the undergrowth by a hover and a flutter, simply flopping down as it reaches the tops of the rushes. It is essentially a ground bird, seldom taking to the wing unless forced to do so.

On November 2nd, 1919, a few miles north of Ballina, a nest was found with two incubated eggs; a couple of other nests were also found not completed. As the season was very dry at that time, it may account for the small number of eggs, three to five being the usual sitting. The nest containing the two eggs was.

placed in the centre of a large tuft of sword-grass near the ground, and was composed of short lengths of rush and grass, and lined with some leaves from a *Callistemon* or *Melaleuca* tree, both of which were growing handy. The longer blades of the tuft were drawn over and down, being interwoven with the rigid stems and shorter blades, and forming a hood over the nest proper, giving the combined structure a tubiform appearance, with the entrance at one end and the exit at the other.

This addition to the nest affords shelter from heavy rain, shade from the scorching sun, and invisibility from enemies, especially the wily and ever-present Raven.

Near Ballina, one day, while walking with a local juvenile through a partially dry swamp covered with rushes, sword-grass and stunted tea-trees, we came across a dead male Coucal. My companion informed me that it was shot on account of eating fowls' eggs, and this was one of the culprits. A most reprehensible procedure is resorted to. A dog is sent into the swamp to scare the birds into the low trees, where they are promptly shot. We boiled the billy on the edge of the swamp, and, just as we were about to sit down to lunch, a Raven flew up from the rushes with an egg on its bill. It appears, to carry off a fowl's egg that it thrusts its bill into the egg, and lets it remain thus till a place of safety is reached, where it can devour the egg free from molestation. My mate was convinced that the Coucal may be wrongly sacrificed. Whether he has convinced the ruthless destroyer or not I have never heard.—P. A. GILBERT, R.A.O.U., Kalembe, N.S.W.

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Kooweerup.—Sixty-five Magpies were counted yesterday in a paddock on newly ploughed ground here; some are busy building their nests, pulling bits of cord out of the bags they find about; they are making the nests in the pine-trees near the private house. There are also Blackbirds, Magpie Larks, Butcher-Birds, Wattle-Birds, Starlings, Thrushes, and Parrots, also many other kinds, so we shall probably have a good nesting season. The place seems alive with birds. We also see some hundreds of Sea-Gulls feeding on what they find on the land being ploughed and harrowed; they are very tame. There are also numbers of Plovers as well. The Sea-Gulls look very picturesque, wheeling about in the air, like silver and grey clouds; our pony got frightened at them, apparently taking the birds for aeroplanes.—J. CECIL, LE SOUEF.

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Birds Observed near Wellington, N.Z.—In my paper on the above, recently published in *The Emu*, I mentioned the probability of the Blue (Reef) Heron (*Demicretta sacra*) nesting in the harbour. I have since been informed that these birds actually do nest in the locality suspected, about six miles from the city.—ROBT. H. D. STIDOLPH, R.A.O.U., Masterton, N.Z.